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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 SANTO DOMINGO 003228

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NSC FOR SHANNON USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD;TREASURY FOR
OASIA-MAUREEN WAFER; USDOC FOR 4322/ITA/MAC/WH/CARIBBEAN
BASIN DIVISION
USDOC FOR 3134/ITA/USFCS/RD/WH; DHS FOR CIS-CARLOS ITURREGUI

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN POLITICS #29: OPPOSITION PRD PICKS NEW
LEADERSHIP

[1](#)1. (SBU) This is #29 in our series of reports on political
events of Leonel Fernandez's first year in office.

PRD Picks New President, Secretary General, and other
Leadership Posts

The main opposition Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) is
still counting votes from the June 12 poll and sorting out
logistical glitches and accusations of direct election of
party officers, open to all 1.2 million PRD fraud. Voting
took place nationwide 8convention8 (balloting) this past
weekend.. In the race for party president, prominent Senator
Ramon Alburquerque from the interior province of Monte Plata
holds a widening lead over former Attorney General Virgilio
Bello Rosa. Orlando Jorge Mera, former president of the
telecommunications agency (INDOTEL) and son of former
Dominican President Salvador Jorge Blanco, is virtually
assured of becoming the next PRD secretary general. Senator
(and PRD spokesman in the Senate) Anbal Garca Duverge is
convincingly ahead in the race for secretary of organization.

The voting at most of the 3100 party polling sites nationwide
appeared to be orderly and turnout was high. Voting had to
be postponed in eight localities, including populous
districts of the capital and of the second city, Santiago.
Logistical problems delayed balloting in some places.
Overall the initial impression was positive: a mass party
organization was renewing itself in an orderly way,
recovering from Hiplito Mejia,s electoral rout in 2004.

Second-running candidate Virgilio Bello Rosa cast the only
shadow across this picture. On June 13 he charged that
persons linked to front-runner Alburquerque had committed
electoral fraud in at least eight localities. Alburquerque
promptly disavowed any such schemes. On June 14 when Bello
Rosa formally accused Senator Alejandro Santos (PRD.
Salcedo) and congressional representative Cristin
Encarnacin (prd, Los Alcarrizos) of theft, alteration, and
destruction of ballots in their communities. The organizing
committee referred the charges to the PRD,s disciplinary
committee for action and launched inquiries in the other
localities.

Party leaders believed going into the &convention8 that a
show of unity and orderly democratic procedure would be a
crucial test of the party,s recovery from the factional
rifts. A test of this hypothesis will be the handling of
Bello Rosa,s accusations. The organizing committee has made
a good start. The accused Senator Santos chairs the Senate
committee considering CAFTA ratification and has been
building a reputation as one of the PRD,s promising younger
legislators. Alburquerque, with three terms as Senate
president and 15 years, experience in the chamber, has
publicly criticized Bello Rosa for &staining8 the electoral
process. The squabble could escalate if not managed
adroitly. And results are still pending from the voting for
21 PRD vice presidents and 21 vice secretaries general.

According to the PRD organizing committee,s bulletins as of
June 15, with 30 percent of the votes counted, Alburquerque
led Bello Rosa by 38 percent to 33 percent ; third-ranked
Emmanul Esquea was early in acknowledging defeat. Only a
plurality) not a majority) is needed to win.

Orlando Jorge Mera had a commanding 61 percent majority for
Secretary General over former presidential legal adviser

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Guido Gomez Mazara at 22 percent. Garcia Duverge had 43
percent vs. 28 percent for Geanilda Vasquez in the race for
Secretary of Organizations.

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Final results ratified by the organizing committee go to a

Congress of PRD delegates on July 5 to be approved as official and forwarded to the Central Election Board (JCE). The delay between voting and approval was planned to allow for resolution of any questions or disputes; depending on the ongoing committee investigations, the fraud allegations might not be laid to rest before that date.

Over the rest of this month other elected party posts will be determined) nearly 9,000 positions at national level and some 42,000 at provincial, municipal, regional, and zonal levels of the PRD organization. More than 75,000 candidates competed in the election, not only in the Dominican Republic but in several other countries where Dominicans reside. According to local press, Dr. Frank Madera, described as a &young professional,8 leads the race for federal president of the PRD in the United States.

The outcome so far shows the PRD establishment still in control, while leaving the door open to needed reforms. Although Mejia did not publicly support any candidate, one of his advisers told the Embassy that Mejia quietly swung his weight behind Alburquerque, urging PRD mayors to endorse the senator and influence the mass of PRD members at local level.

This was in gratitude for Alburquerque,s vigorous participation in Mejia,s reelection campaign last year, in contrast to the attitudes of other contenders for the party leadership. Bello Rosa resigned as Attorney General in 2002 over differences with Mejia and was reportedly backed by Mejia,s rivals in the PRD.

Jorge Mera is the heir apparent of the Jorge political dynasty. He served in the Mejia administration but is not closely identified with the Mejia faction of the PRD. Unlike his father, the president from 1982-1986 who spent years in prison, convicted of corruption after leaving office, Jorge Mera talks and writes in his frequent op-ed columns about reforming party and government structures and combating corruption. He will replace current secretary general Rafael &Fello8 Suberv, renowned for corruption when he was mayor of Santo Domingo in the 1980s. Mild-mannered and uncharismatic, Jorge Mera was nonetheless the overwhelming choice of the party establishment over his only serious adversary Guido Gomez Mazara, widely viewed as corrupt, linked to organized crime and disliked for his high-handed manner as legal counsel to Meja.

Mejia himself remains influential in PRD circles but no longer dominates.

Alburquerque has a firm base in the Senate, where 28 of 32 members belong to his party, and in the lower house where the PRD has a plurality. He has run twice for the PRD presidential nomination, in 2000 and 2004. He is certain to work more smoothly with the congressional leadership than current party Vicente Sanchez Baret, whose inept handling of PRD legislators led to a complete breakdown in relations. With Alburquerque the PRD may mount a more disciplined and constructive opposition to the PLD administration of President Fernandez.

12. (U) Drafted by Bainbridge Cowell

13. (U) This piece and others in our series can be consulted at our SIPRNET site <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/> along with extensive other material.
Hertell